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RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 0662  
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE 1000  
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RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 3029  
RUEHKM/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 1026  
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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/CEN

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TAGS: PGOV PREL ASEC KISL PINS PTER PHUM SOCI AF UZ  
SUBJECT: UZBEKISTAN: FORMER OFFICIAL COMMENTS ON FOREIGN  
POLICY, TERRORISM, AFGHANISTAN

Classified By: Poloff Steven Prohaska for reasons 1.4 (b, d).

¶1. (C) Summary: On November 13, Furkat Sidikov (a former official who remains affiliated with the Government of Uzbekistan) discussed a range of political and security issues with Poloff and expressed interest in developing bilateral cooperation. Sidikov asserted that Uzbekistan is curious about how the new administration will view Central Asia and what its approach to democratization and human rights will be. Tashkent wishes to engage with the United States to protect Uzbekistan's sovereignty. Sidikov suggested greater bilateral law enforcement cooperation to face the threat of terrorism in Central Asia, as well as joint efforts in educating Afghans about moderate Islam. He also asked for specific recommendations on what Uzbekistan can do to improve the bilateral relationship, noting plans for a Government of Uzbekistan (GOU) roundtable and that the GOU is confused about how much progress the U.S. expects it to make. Though it is difficult to judge the veracity of some of Sidikov's claims, his background and the similarity of his comments to other official remarks suggest that his views at least partly reflect those of the Government of Uzbekistan. End summary.

¶2. (C) On November 13, Furkat Sidikov--who works at a government-affiliated think tank and previously served for several years at Uzbekistan's Embassy in Washington--discussed a wide range of issues with Poloff, including the bilateral relationship, foreign policy, terrorism and Afghanistan. Sidikov expressed interest in the development of cooperation between Uzbekistan and the United States, noting that "misunderstandings" had contributed to the deterioration in earlier relations. He said that he is trying to help Uzbekistan to understand the U.S. mentality, and noted that further communication--including interaction between non-government experts on both sides and

conferences--can effectively promote this because sometimes "experts can say what diplomats can't say."

Views of Cooperation, Interest in Counterbalancing Russia

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¶ 13. (C) Sidikov asserted that Uzbekistan is the most independent country in Central Asia and the only one that can work independently of Russia, noting that Uzbekistan did not bother to consult with Russia before permitting the U.S. to use its territory for (former) Karshi-Khanabad Airbase. He and others in Uzbekistan are curious about the new administration's priorities and how much interest it will have in Central Asia. Noting that democracy and human rights are sensitive issues for Uzbekistan, Sidikov said that both Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan want to know what the new administration's policy on these issues will be.

¶ 14. (C) The U.S. can either present a constructive human rights policy aimed at helping Uzbekistan, or it could make demands and apply political pressure, he said. Sidikov, stating that he knows how the Government of Uzbekistan thinks, asserted repeatedly that the former, more cooperative approach--framed so as to help the people of Uzbekistan--would yield better results. "Unfortunately, Uzbekistan can't do so much overnight. Democracy in Uzbekistan does not exist and there are huge problems with human rights," he admitted. Furthermore, elites in Uzbekistan want reform to proceed slowly and they want to preserve their power. They are prioritizing security and stability. Sidikov recommended that the new administration take steps to build the trust of Central Asian states in democracy, and advised that it indicate its interest in "evolution" instead of "revolution." He warned that Central Asia remains afraid of the possibility of a color revolution and regime change.

¶ 15. (C) Sidikov also complained that efforts to link security cooperation to human rights are "counterproductive" and said that sanctions are ineffectual. "In 2006 and 2007, the U.S. imposed sanctions, but this didn't help the United States or Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan's economy and military do not depend on the West," he said. "Europe understood that." A problem in the bilateral relationship is that expectations are too high, he continued.

¶ 16. (C) He said that more exposure to the West and Western education would be beneficial for Uzbekistan. Sidikov expressed interest in broad information-sharing between the United States and Uzbekistan in intelligence, other government-to-government cooperation, and expert-level interaction. He also recommended that the U.S. Embassy work with experts who are close to the Government of Uzbekistan, because such experts have greater access to official policy. Bringing a greater number of U.S. Government officials to conferences in Uzbekistan also would help, he advised.

¶ 17. (C) Sidikov complained that Russia still views countries in Central Asia as satellites, and that Russia does not understand that Central Asian states need to have their own foreign policies. Russia is an important economic partner, but Uzbekistan needs to be careful in its dealings with it, he said. Sidikov stated that good relations with the United States can help protect Uzbekistan's sovereignty. Despite his wariness of Russia, Sidikov praised the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) as an especially effective regional organization, and suggested that either the U.S. or NATO engage with it. He also noted that there are pro-Russian elements in the Government of Uzbekistan because of bilateral ties and exposure to Russian training.

Views of the Terrorist Threat

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¶ 18. (C) Sidikov asserted that the threat of terrorism in Central Asia is real and that several terrorist organizations--including the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan

(IMU) and the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU)--remain active in the region. Moreover, a new radical organization called "Hizb-u-Nusrad," or "Light of Allah," broke off from Hizb-ut-Tahrir in the past two to three years and its supporters are mainly from Uzbekistan. Sidikov said that it is harder for terrorist cells to operate in Uzbekistan thanks to Uzbekistan's effective law enforcement, but terrorism is more of a problem in Kyrgyzstan because the Government of Kyrgyzstan lacks sufficient control, and thus jihadist groups are able to operate relatively freely. The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan has weakened, but small extremist groups from the Middle East have arisen with anti-U.S. and anti-Semitic views and enjoy support in the region. Moreover, radical Salafids and moderate Hanafids are competing for influence in Central Asia. Sidikov suggested that Uzbekistan and the United States develop further law enforcement cooperation to combat the perceived threat, and asserted that extremists were the ones who had benefited from the downturn in U.S.-Uzbekistan relations. He also lamented that cooperation

between terrorist organizations is better than cooperation between the United States, Europe, and Uzbekistan.

#### Recommendations for Afghanistan

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¶19. (C) Sidikov stated that many Uzbeks served as intelligence officers in Afghanistan during the Soviet Union's war there, and thus can bring much expertise on the country to the table in collaborative efforts with the United States. "What the United States did in liberating Afghanistan was amazing," he stated. He praised the financial assistance and reconstruction efforts the United States is involved with. "But if you want to win in Afghanistan, NATO also also should fight at the ideological level. What kind of ideology is the United States bringing to Afghanistan? Afghans don't understand the concept of democracy--it can't apply there." The U.S. needs to find another ideology suitable for Afghanistan. He also asserted that United States and German law enforcement training in Afghanistan was improving the skills of authorities there, but he doubted that this was actually addressing radical mentalities among some of those personnel.

¶110. (C) "We need to work on education for Afghans," he continued. He cited Uzbekistan's efforts in trying to establish new kinds of religious education, including the Islamic University of Tashkent, which had produced "nice imams" that are well-trained. He suggested that developing books and using the media to portray more a moderate of Islam in Afghanistan could serve efforts to promote stability.

¶111. (C) The United States is losing the information war, so it needs to pursue propaganda efforts that show it is not fighting against the Islamic world, he said. Sidikov suggested that the U.S. come up with awards to give to good journalists and democratic activists in the Islamic world, or others who are committed to improving relations with the U.S., asserting that this would help to change mentalities in the region.

#### Request for Suggestions on Improving Relationship

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¶112. (C) Noting that there would be a roundtable in the near future among members of the Government of Uzbekistan to discuss policy toward the United States, Sidikov asked for suggestions on concrete things Uzbekistan can do--particularly in human rights--to improve the bilateral relationship. He said that the GOU is trying to understand USG policy, and it is unclear on how much progress the United States expects Uzbekistan to make.

#### Comment:

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¶113. (C) It is difficult to judge the accuracy of many of Sidikov's comments, as well as to what extent they reflect

the views of the Government of Uzbekistan. Nevertheless, he appears to be well-connected, and a number of his comments do track with what we have heard from GOU officials--such as the preference for delinking security cooperation from human rights, the concern about the situation in Afghanistan, and desire for slow reform.

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